Improvement in the EFL Learning Process in VET Studies. A Structural Equations Model of Affective Variables: English Language Anxiety, Willingness to Communicate and Self-efficacy in English

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ABSTRACT

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is undergoing an international and national improvement process in order to achieve internationalization, among others. To this end, it is necessary to optimize the EFL level of VET students. Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to analyze the direct and indirect effects of English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English on the academic performance in EFL among VET students. The sample consisted of 100 Spanish VET students (75% female -

25% male) aged between 18 and 40 years old. Questionnaires on English language anxiety (FLCAS), willingness to communicate in English (WTC), and self-efficacy in English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) were administered. In addition, academic grade was used to measure the performance in English. The proposed model received a satisfactory fit. The results show that English language anxiety significantly influences academic performance and has a medium effect on willingness to communicate in English. Practical implications for organizing English classes to improve English proficiency in VET are discussed.

Keywords: anxiety, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, academic performance, EFL

Introduction

Vocational Education and Training (hereafter VET) has proven to be one of the driving forces for the growth of productive sectors. In addition, the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2017) includes goals aimed at ensuring high-quality VET by increasing the number of skilled workers in the labor market (European Commission, 2019). Proficiency in foreign languages (hereafter FL), especially English, considered a *lingua franca* (Jenkins, 2009), allows students easy access to the labor market. The expansion of the international business world and the geographical mobility of jobs have led to the need for vocational students to use English correctly in order to communicate successfully in their future careers (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2021). The importance of learning a foreign language, especially English, is also crucial for the development of citizens. However, it seems that the standard English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) curriculum is very generic and does not address the needs of the individual vocational modules. As a result, they do not promote the necessary language skills to perform their professional activities in an internationalized market successfully.

The role of affective factors in learning English as a foreign language has been studied for decades. Studies (Bao & Lui, 2021; De-la-Peña & Chaves-Yuste, 2022) seem to indicate that students have an affective barrier that makes it difficult for them to learn English, which reduces their perception of self-efficacy and leads to low academic performance. More specifically, a recent study (De-la-Peña et al., 2023) points to the relevance of affective variables on the self-efficacy of English language learners in VET education. In this study, we found that anxiety, motivation, and willingness

to communicate in English predict the self-efficacy of VET students' English proficiency; anxiety has a negative influence, while motivation and willingness to communicate in English have a positive influence. This paper will specifically examine how affective factors (English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English) influence the academic performance of EFL students in VET education. The aim is to know these correlations in order to design the organization of English classes and optimize the language proficiency of VET students. Within this framework, this study proposes to investigate the affective factors that contribute to vocational students' academic performance in English as a foreign language. To this end, it focuses on affective variables whose role facilitates or inhibits English language learning and performance. Specifically, it aims to analyze the influence of affective variables of English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and English self-efficacy on vocational students' academic performance in English as a foreign language. Accordingly, this objective aims to answer the following research question: How does each of the analyzed affective variables affect academic performance in EFL in VET? The answer in the form of empirical results will enable us to achieve the proposed goal and contribute knowledge on the topic of affective variables and academic performance in English as a foreign language among VET students.

International research (Corpas, 2017; Montero et al., 2020) has shown that VET students from different countries have low language proficiency in English. The need for good language competence in English as a basis for the internationalization of VET has led us to carry out this study in the context of Spain. In Spain, the strategic plan for VET (2018) needs to be adapted to meet the needs of future and current workers in the context of a new economic growth model (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020). Spanish VET studies last two academic years for students aged 18 and over. They offer education and training in different professional areas that meet the diverse needs of society. Students can follow basic, intermediate, or advanced levels of VET studies. The advanced level, which is the level the participants of this work study, provides students with a high level of technical certification that makes it easier for them to find a skilled job. VET students are usually very heterogeneous, both in terms of age and English language skills. They are between 18 and over 30 years old and have a language level of B1+ according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which makes teaching them quite challenging. The platform *Observatorio de la FP* (2021) points out the stagnation of VET studies in Spain in terms of proficiency in English as a foreign language. A recent study (De-la-Peña & Chaves-Yuste, 2022) of VET students in Spain found that almost half of these students

confirmed that they do not have an adequate level of English at this stage of their training. In this study, 84% of the students considered that a good level of English was essential for their professional performance.

In light of these data and in the context of the internationalization of VET, this paper proposes to investigate the impact that the affective variables of English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English may have on VET students' academic performance in EFL. The research question is: How can affective factors (English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English) influence EFL students' academic performance in vocational education? The results of this question will suggest pedagogical implications aimed at changing the methodology and/or structure of EFL instruction in VET education and improving academic performance.

Theoretical Framework

This section reviews the scientific literature on English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English.

Anxiety towards EFL

Anxiety is considered the most relevant affective barrier to language learning and is thought to be inversely related to language acquisition: the more anxious, the lower the acquisition, and vice versa (Bao & Liu, 2021). It can also affect other affective factors, such as self-efficacy or self-confidence. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) explained that there are three categories of anxiety: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. If the anxiety relates to understanding and speaking a foreign language, the anxiety is a situation-specific construct. Speaking in public in a foreign language can trigger anxiety in many students, even those who have little anxiety in other areas of language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). This situation is very generalized in the Spanish context. Students actively participate in all the proposed tasks, but when they have to communicate in English, they feel insecure, anxious, and hesitant and do not enjoy the tasks (Criado & Mengual, 2017). Horwitz and Young (1991) described foreign language anxiety (hereafter FLA) as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128). They argued that there are three types of FLA: Communicative Apprehension (fear of communicating with other people), Test Anxiety (fear of exams), and Negative Evaluation (fear of being evaluated negatively by others) and that it can be low, medium, or high depending on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) score. Despite this classification,

in this paper, we will examine English language anxiety in general, and analyze its correlation with other affective factors, such as students' willingness to communicate in English or self-efficacy in English and its impact on academic performance. MacIntyre et al. (1998) showed that FLA can be detrimental to the learning process as it can affect students' willingness to communicate (hereafter WTC) in foreign language classrooms and students' self-efficacy in English. They identified five main effects of anxiety on foreign language classroom performance: (i) language proficiency, (ii) interpersonal communication, (iii) speed and accuracy of learning, (iv) quality of communication, and (v) self-esteem or self-confidence. In this work, we aim to investigate the correlation between English language anxiety and (i) language proficiency and (iv) quality of communication and analyze its influence on participants' language performance, as FLA has been found to be one of the best predictors of performance in foreign language classes (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000), (ii) interpersonal communication, as measured by students' WTC in English in EFL classes, and (v) self-confidence, as measured by students' perceptions of their self-efficacy in English. However, anxiety is not always presented as a negative factor. Rashtchi and Keyvanfar (2002) argued that anxiety in FL learning can be positive to a certain extent and only has a negative effect when it is too high and can hinder any linguistic effort. An effective way to reduce anxiety in the FL classroom so that it can be controlled and produce positive results is by providing a digital environment. Digital tools seem to alleviate anxiety and facilitate WTC since online communication generally provides a more comfortable environment and can make shy students feel more relaxed (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006). Lee and Hsieh (2019) argued that contemporary EFL learners feel more comfortable with digital methods because digital environments provide social support and additional psychological benefits that reduce L2 anxiety and improve WTC. In this sense, Lee and Dressman (2018) observed how students' anxiety decreased, and their WTC increased when they practiced English through digital activities outside the classroom (e.g., social media or multiplayer online role-playing games). Healthy relationships between teachers and learners can lower FLA. When teachers set different goals based on students' learning styles, characteristics and abilities, learners can feel less inhibition and anxiety, feel more confident, and interact with others in a relaxed environment (Bao & Liu, 2021). In addition, teachers should make students aware that making mistakes is a natural process in language learning and that this is the only way to develop their language competence (Estrada, 2014). Also, some active learning methods, such as Language Cooperative Learning have been shown to reduce students' anxiety as students cooperate and work together both inside and outside the classroom, share knowledge, and help each other in a supportive environment

in secondary and tertiary education (Mon, 2019; Siahpoosh, 2020). We expect similar results in studies on VET. In addition, Lee (2018) has demonstrated in one study that immersion and study abroad programs reduce the anxiety of L2 learners, but due to the high cost of these programs, this is not always an option for all students.

Reducing language anxiety and improving WTC in FL should be encouraged in order to facilitate authentic communication. By understanding the causes of anxiety, EFL learners can manage their anxiety in the FL classroom, and teachers can lower anxiety levels in a relaxed environment.

Willingness to Communicate in EFL

Using a FL in the classroom demonstrates students' WTC. It has been defined as the "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, or persons, using an L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p.547). Scientific research has proven a severe negative correlation between FLA and WTC (Muamaroh & Prihartanti, 2013; Murtiningsih, 2016; Rastegar & Karami, 2015; Saka & Merç, 2021). Students with a moderate FLC have a low WTC. In addition, Cong-Lem and Thu-Hang (2018) has found a relationship between WTC, FLA, and FL performance. The students with high WTC showed higher FL performance and lower FLA. However, Yashima (2002) found no correlation between students' self-efficacy, WTC, and speaking ability.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) believe that psychological, linguistic and communicative variables (e.g., group climate, personality, social situation, communicative competence, self-confidence, etc.) describe and predict FL WTC. WTC in a foreign language combines negative emotions (e.g., boredom or fear) and positive emotions (e.g., joy or pride). Manipuspika (2018) considered that learners may have different levels of WTC due to their different communication behaviors, and Amirian et al. (2020) explained that introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, apprehension, and cultural diversity may influence learners' WTC. Ningsih et al. (2018) felt that WTC must communicate in English without external pressure. Therefore, it is relevant to create a stress-free environment in the classroom to encourage student interaction in oral exchanges so that students feel like communicating in a FL. If this relaxed environment is not provided, students may experience anxiety, restlessness, inhibition, and boredom and may not feel like speaking to the teacher and their classmates, as was the case in the study conducted by Nasiruddin and Hum (2018), who found that their participants were unwilling to speak in English in class. In this line, Yashima et al. (2004) suggested that future research on WTC in English should focus on contextual or situational variables that increase or decrease students' WTC in English class and outside

class, which would facilitate their development of communicative competence and thus, their access to the labor market. Cao and Philip (2006) claimed that WTC is also influenced by factors other than the classroom environment, such as group size, trust, or familiarity with the topic. In addition, Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) found that students' WTC can also be influenced by planning time, cooperation, or familiarity with the interlocutor.

Cognitive and personal factors can also significantly impact on language learners' WTC, as WTC correlates with communication anxiety and ambiguity tolerance. For Dewaele and Pavelescu (2019), learners' personality and experiences shape their emotions and directly influence their WTC. Furthermore, as Šafranj and Katić (2019) stated, there is an important correlation between the WTC and the Big Five dimensions (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism). Thus, extroverted students or those more willing to communicate in a foreign language will achieve better learning outcomes because the communicative use of the language facilitates their learning (Khajavy et al., 2018). Introverted students and those with high FL anxiety tend to be reluctant to communicate and have a low WTC (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Šafranj & Katić, 2019). The reverse case is also possible, as there may be no direct correlation between students who are aware of their anxiety but still want to participate in speaking exercises to improve their speaking performance (Alemi & Pahmforoosh, 2012), or there may be no direct correlation between FLA and WTC (Alghalil, 2016). Therefore, we consider it relevant to investigate whether there is a correlation between these two affective factors, i.e., FLA and WTC, and Spanish VET students' self-efficacy, and to analyze their impact on their academic performance in EFL classes.

Self-efficacy in English

In this study, self-efficacy is defined as the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p.3) and is considered as a central element of social-cognitive theory. Bandura (1997) assumes that self-efficacy protects a person from psychological problems such as anxiety. Scientific research has shown a strong negative correlation between self-efficacy and FLA (Cheng, 2004; Mills et al., 2006; Saka & Merç, 2021). In addition, Köseoğlu (2015) found that self-efficacy directly explains 30% of academic performance.

According to Buadas et al. (2017), students control their learning process when planning, organizing, self-evaluating their performance, and using metacognitive strategies. Learners with marked self-efficacy continue to pursue their goals despite difficulties (Marashi & Dakhili, 2015), which can

positively impact their WTC. If learners have low self-esteem, we expect low WTC because they expect negative reactions from their listeners (Manipuspika, 2018). On the other hand, Lee and Lee (2019) found that learners with high self-efficacy had higher L2 WTC, especially in digital environments, when learners perceive a more subdued environment. Self-efficacy correlates significantly with academic performance. Tridinati (2018) showed how self-efficacy correlates with oral communication performance. Therefore, it seems that if students' self-efficacy improves, their WTC increases and their FLA decreases.

To summarize, affective variables such as FLA, WTC, inside and outside the classroom, students' self-efficacy, and language performance in tertiary or secondary education have been examined, and only one study has looked at these factors for VET students in Indonesia (Murtiningsih, 2016). In order to fill this gap and due to the relevance of the internationalization of VET in Spain and the requirements of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2007), this work aims to analyze the relationship between the aforementioned factors (FLA, WTC, FL achievement and self-efficacy) that Spanish VET students show when learning English as a foreign language. After analyzing the data, we can pinpoint several pedagogical implications that can improve the EFL teaching practice in the VET stage. This study can contribute to the scientific literature on the influence of affective factors on EFL students' academic performance in VET.

Methodology

Design

This quantitative research with a non-experimental but explanatory design aims to test a model about the relationships between the variables of the study. The research question is: How can affective factors (English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English) influence EFL students' academic performance in vocational education?

The research aims to investigate the influence of affective factors (English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English) on EFL students' academic performance in VET.

The research hypothesis is that the affective factors (English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, and self-efficacy in English) influence the academic performance of VET students in EFL

Sample

The participants (n= 100) were selected incidentally according to their accessibility. All were Spanish VET students (75% female, 25% male) from the socio-cultural and community services sector, aged between 18 and 40 years, with a mean age of 20 years (SD=1.51). Their first language was Spanish. Before the experiment, all participants were administered a diagnostic test to confirm that their L2 proficiency was B1+ according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001).

The VET centers do not offer bilingual courses but only count an English module throughout the academic year. Only 20% (7 women and 13 men) of the students have an official English certificate, and the remaining 80% do not have a certificate (62 female and 18 male). The inclusion criteria for the sample are that they are currently undergoing VET, that they are attending the English module, level B2, that they have completed all administered instruments, that they have not completed the assessment tests before the experiment, and that they have no diagnosis of learning difficulties, physical, sensory and/or psychopathological problems. All students were informed that they could leave the study at any time.

Instruments

In this study, four questionnaires were distributed to all students in March 2022 to assess their self-efficacy in English, their WTC in English, their English language anxiety in EFL classes, and their academic performance in EFL:

- *Ad hoc* student self-efficacy questionnaire on English language proficiency based on basic English linguistic skills according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). Within this framework and lacking a specific measure to assess the English language skills of vocational students, we developed this questionnaire with five questions to assess VET students' English language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, and reading comprehension. This five-question questionnaire enables the data collection on vocational students' self-efficacy in basic English language skills for this study. The questions are: To indicate the level of difficulty of the ability to listen to English, speak English, read English, write English, and understand English language texts. A Likert scale was designed, assigning 1 for the easiest, 2 for fairly easy, 3 for neither easy nor difficult, 4 for fairly difficult, and 5 for the most difficult. Answers with a value of 1 indicate ease and minimal difficulty in the corresponding linguistic skill. Validity was calculated using the kappa coefficient (0.92). It was found that the agreement

between the judges was good. The judges randomly selected the indicators and assessed their level of agreement regarding their coherence, relevance, and clarity. The reliability of its internal consistency in the sample was good with the ordinal omega coefficient ($\Omega = 0.862$).

- Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire (WTC) in English (Díaz-Pinto, 2009; Santos, 2014). It is the Spanish version of the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTCS) by McCroskey and Baer (1985), which was used by Díaz-Pinto (2009) and Santos (2014). This questionnaire is the most widely used to assess WTC in English and includes ten questions on ten different situations that provide information about students' WTC orally in English. In this study, we used the Spanish version of Santos (2014) for the first nine questions and the version of Díaz-Pinto (2010) for the last question. These versions were used because they are better adapted to the characteristics of the study sample with native Spanish speakers and the same educational system. The questionnaire used can be found in Appendix A. The answers were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5 points, where 0 stands for never, 1 for rarely, 2 for sometimes, 3 for about 50% of the time, 4 for usually, and 5 for almost always. The final score is the sum of the ten indicators and ranges from 0 points (low willingness) to 50 points (highest willingness). The reliability for this sample with the ordinal omega coefficient was 0.934.

- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Pérez-Paredes & Martínez-Sánchez, 2001). It is the Spanish adaptation of the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) used by Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001). This scale is the most widely used scale for assessing anxiety about oral communication in a FL and includes 33 indicators that assess fear of negative evaluations or tests in EFL classes and fear of speaking in English. The Spanish version is used in this study because it is adapted to the characteristics of the Spanish-speaking sample and is the most commonly used in research on anxiety in Spanish. The scale can be found in Appendix B. Each indicator is rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5: 1 stands for complete agreement, 2 for agreement, 3 for neither agreement nor disagreement, 4 for disagreement, and 5 for complete disagreement. The total score is calculated by adding up the 33 indicators, with 24 indicators inverted in order to be interpreted correctly. The score can range from 33 to 165 points. A score of 33 points means that the student shows no anxiety in the FL classroom, and a score of 165 points means that the student is overly anxious in the FL classroom. The higher the score on the scale, the higher the student's level of anxiety. Using factorial statistics (Varimax), Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001) identified four factors: communication anxiety (items 1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 18, 20, 24, 31 and 33), fear of situations and processes (items 4, 7, 15, 16, 23, 25, 29 and 30), discomfort in using English inside and outside the classroom (items 8, 14 and

32), and negative attitude towards learning (items 6 and 17). Pérez-Paredes and Martínez-Sánchez (2001) showed reliability and validity with an internal consistency of 0.889 and reliability with the ordinal omega coefficient for this sample of 0.963.

- Academic performance in EFL: Students self-report their grades in the English module exam. This questionnaire consists of only one question about students' academic performance in the English module. We used a questionnaire because it is an individualized way of reporting the grades and making students aware of their grades when they write them. The question is: Indicate your academic grade for the English module on a scale of 0 to 10 points. The grades for this English module in VET in Spain range from 0 fail (F), 5-6 satisfactory (C), 7-8 good (B), 9-9.9 excellent (A), and 10 points excellent distinction (A+). These grades were achieved following a standardized EFL test at level B2 (Cambridge English First), in which the various language skills were assessed. This study tries to address the need to raise the level of VET students focused on the necessary key competences to promote linguistic communication in a multimodal way and also to integrate plurilingual competencies that takes into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the contemporary world. This self-reported grade is checked with each English module teacher for verification.

Procedure

The first step was to apply to the ethics committee and the VET educational centers for permission to conduct the research. This research was approved by the International University of La Rioja (UNIR) ethics committee and follows the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki. In addition, a teacher was present during school hours at the education centers when the instruments were administered to resolve any questions or unforeseen problems from VET students.

All students gave their consent to participate in the study. The students could decide at any time whether they wanted to participate in the intervention or discontinue participation, and they were assured of the confidentiality of the data. They filled in the instruments for about 30 minutes in a room with optimal light and sound conditions. The instruments used were the four questionnaires. The order was the same for all samples: *ad hoc* questionnaire on self-efficacy in English language skills, academic performance, WTC questionnaire, and EFL-FCLAS questionnaire.

All students agreed to participate, and the questionnaires were completed in class with the teacher.

Data Analysis

Structural equation modeling is used to examine the effects between different variables in this study: English language anxiety, willingness to communicate in English, self-efficacy in English, and EFL academic performance), which can simultaneously act as dependent and independent variables. Testing theoretical models with data are based on previous research on the variables of the work collected in the Theoretical Framework.

The analyses were conducted in two stages: (i) a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the construct validity of three data collection instruments (self-efficacy, FLA, and WTC). This study was carried out jointly for these three instruments and estimated a single model with three dimensions, each composed of the items of the corresponding questionnaire; and (ii) an analysis of the effects between the three dimensions on the academic outcomes using the path analysis technique.

For the analysis, we used AMOS 27 software. For the first stage, due to the ordinal nature of the items that make up the different measurement instruments, the CFA was performed using the polychoric correlation matrix and unweighted least squares estimation, using bootstrap to obtain more precise error values. In the second stage, the Spearman correlation matrix and, as in the first stage, unweighted least squares estimation utilizing bootstrap were used for the path analysis after an analysis of the normality of the distribution of the scores in the four variables analyzed for the estimation of the errors.

The multivariate normality of the element set was tested using Mardia's multivariate symmetry and kurtosis statistic, with significant values indicating non-normality. The overall fit of the CFA is assessed using the normalized robust chi-squared indices (χ^2 /d.f.), with values between 3 and 5 considered acceptable; RMSEA, which is appropriate with values below 0.08; and CFI and TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), the comparative fit, which is acceptable at 0.90 and above. Following Hu and Bentler (1999), an adequate fit in the combination of these indices is sufficient proof of validity. Convergent validity is also examined with the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and reliability with the ordinal omega coefficient, calculated from the factorial weights of the AFC. Regarding AVE, values of 0.5 are considered enough when combined with an adequate reliability index (0.8 or more) to ensure the convergent validity of the instruments.

In the second phase, the path analysis, the normality of each dimension was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk statistic, with significant values indicating the non-normality of the distribution of the scores. An initial model of interdimensional effects was defined considering the theoretical

assumptions. Standardized regression coefficients were estimated to identify and compare the effects between the variables. The significance of the effects was examined, and the probability values above 0.05 indicate no correlation between these dimensions. Taking this information into account, the model was refined, and a final model with significant effects was developed. We assessed the overall fit of these models using the R2 statistic, which was interpreted as the proportion of variance explained by each dimension. According to Hattie (2009), effects that explain one percent or more of the variability in outcomes can be highlighted in the education domain (R2>0.01). More specifically, effects between 0.01 and 0.039 are considered small, between 0.04 and 0.14 are considered medium, and above these values are considered highly relevant.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the values for skewness and kurtosis of the variables analyzed.

Table 1

Skewness and kurtosis of the observed variables

	Willingness	Self-efficacy	Anxiety	Grade
Skewness	0.678	0.281	-0.034	-0.034
Std. error skewness	0.241	0.241	0.241	0.241
Kurtosis	0.0561	-0.578	-0.650	-0.722
Std. error kurtosis	0.478	0.478	0.478	0.478
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.950	0.975	0.986	0.913
Shapiro-Wilk p	< 0.001	0.052	0.400	< 0.001

*p<.05

The multivariate index of the Mardia coefficients tests the normality of the set of items and establishes that they do not correspond to symmetry and that the multivariate normal distribution cannot be confirmed. Skewness coefficient (1248, χ^2=20590, p< 0.001), kurtosis coefficient (2322, z= 1.39, p=0.163).

The overall CFA results indicate that the fit is acceptable when the chi-square (χ^2 /d.f.= 1.375), the RMSEA (0.062), the CFI (0.917), and the TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index) (0.913) are used for the comparative fit. Following Hu and Bentler (1999) as proof of validity, an acceptable fit in the

combination of these indices is sufficient. Convergent validity is also examined, with the variance explained using the average variance extracted (AVE) for self-efficacy (0.561), willingness to communicate (0.591), and anxiety (0.430) showing acceptable values for the first two variables and reliability with the ordinal omega coefficient for self-efficacy (0.862), WTC (0.934) and FLA (0.963) indicating good reliability.

Subsequently, an initial model of the effects between the dimensions is defined in the path analysis, taking into account the theoretical assumptions. Figure 1 shows the structural equation model.

Figure 1

Standardized solution of the first structural model
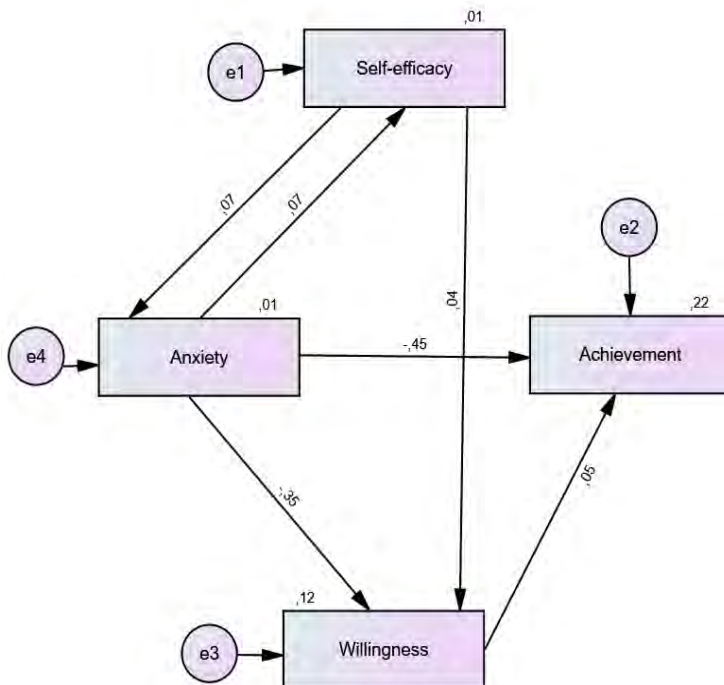
In this model, Figure 1 and Table 2 show the effect relationship between the independent, intermediate, and dependent variables. The results of the analysis show that only the negative effect of FLA on WTC and the negative effect of FLA on students' English grades are significant. The p-value for the contrast used is 0.05.

Table 2

Results for the first structural model

Parameter			B	Lower	Upper	p
Willingness	<---	Anxiety	-0.351	-0.486	-0.195	0.010
Willingness	<---	Self-efficacy	0.041	-0.212	0.230	0.842
EFL Grade	<---	Anxiety_1	-0.445	-0.631	-0.220	0.010
EFL Grade	<---	Willingness	0.053	-0.150	0.251	0.606
Total_Anxiety_1	<---	Self-efficacy	0.069	-0.200	0.254	0.317
Self-efficacy	<---	Anxiety	0.069	-0.083	0.314	0.244

The data are presented in Table 3 to test the fit of the overall model. When evaluating the model fit, the higher the model fit, the higher the availability of the model and the more significant the parameter estimate. Table 5 shows the value of the R2 statistic, which indicates how much variance is explained by the dependent variables (to which the effects are applied). The results express that the model explains 21.7% of the variance in academic performance and 12.1% of the variance in the results in the case of WTC in English. The p-value used is 0.05, and the coefficients are standardized.

Table 3

Results of the global fit for the first structural model

	R^2	Lower	Upper	p
Self-efficacy	0.014	-0.044	0.121	0.352
Anxiety	0.014	-0.061	0.086	0.299
Willingness	0.121	0.045	0.251	0.010
EFL Grade	0.217	0.065	0.428	0.010

Considering the previous results, the model is refined, and a final model is presented (Figure 2), which includes the significant effects and eliminates the non-significant effects.

Figure 2

Standardized solution of the final structural model
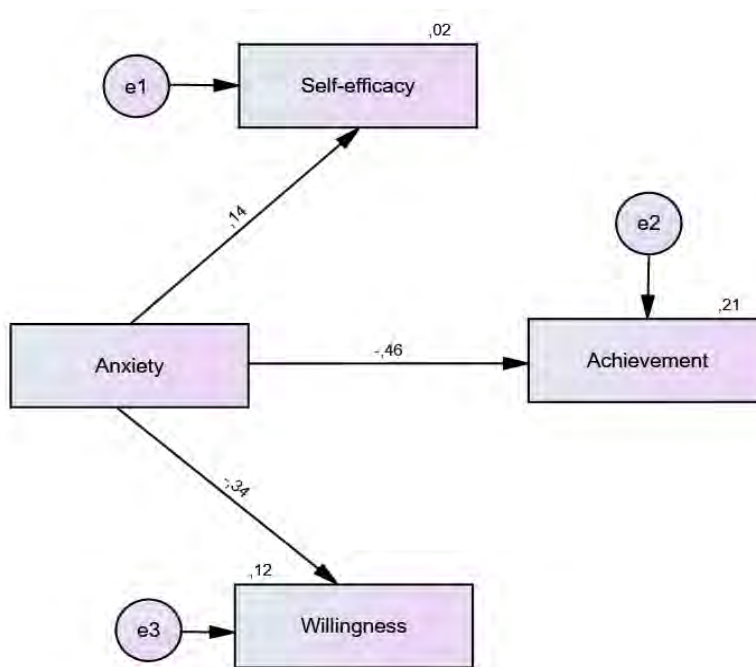
In this final model, Table 4 shows the effect relationship between the variables when the non-significant paths are removed. The results of the analysis show that only the negative effect of FLA on WTC and the negative effect of FLA on the student's academic grade in English are significant, and the positive effect of FLA on self-efficacy is not significant. The p-value used for the comparison is 0.05.

Table 4

Results for the final structural model

Parameter			B	Lower	Upper	p
EFL Grade	<---	Anxiety	-0.463	-0.639	-0.266	0.010

Parameter			B	Lower	Upper	p
Self-efficacy	<---	Anxiety	0.137	-0.067	0.335	0.164
Willingness	<---	Anxiety	-0.345	-0.488	-0.197	0.010

Table 5 shows the value of the R2 statistic for testing the general fit of the model. In this case, self-efficacy in English is significant, and the model explains 1.9% of self-efficacy in English with a positive effect of FLA, 11.9% of WTC in English with a negative effect of FLA, and 21.5% of academic EFL score with a negative effect of FLA. The p-value used for the comparison is 0.05, and the coefficients are standardized.

Table 5

Results of the global fit for the final structural model

Parameter	R^2	Lower	Upper	p
Willingness	0.119	0.039	0.238	0.010
Self-efficacy	0.019	0.000	0.112	0.010
EFL Grade	0.215	0.071	0.409	0.010

Finally, it should be noted that the two models explain an almost equal percentage of the variance in EFL academic grade (21%) and WTC in English (12%), and the second model adds self-efficacy (1.9%). Therefore, the variables used explain only 21% of the EFL academic score.

If we analyze the regression coefficients for each of the paths proposed in the final model separately, we can see that the effect of FLA on EFL academic grades and WTC in English is significant at a p<0.05 level of significance. It is also noted that the highest direct effect of FLA is on EFL academic grade (R2= -0.46), followed by WTC (R2= -0.34), and the only positive direct effect is on self-efficacy.

Discussion and Conclusions

The research conducted (Corpas, 2017; Montero et al., 2020) has shed light on the importance of improving the EFL language proficiency of VET students. In addition, a recent study of Spanish VET students (De-la-Peña & Chaves-Yuste, 2022) found that 84% of students felt that a good command

of English was essential for their future employment. For the above reasons, this paper aims to analyze the influence of affective factors such as English language anxiety, WTC in English, and self-efficacy in English on the academic performance of VET students in EFL, considering that the affective factors may have a positive influence on learning. With these results, the aim is to improve the organization of English language teaching in order to optimize the language competence of VET students in the context of the strategic importance of the internationalization of VET in Spain and Europe.

Yashima et al.'s (2004) study, which argues that future research on WTC should focus on contextual and situational variables that make a person more or less willing to communicate outside of the class, led to an analysis of discomfort in using English inside and outside of the classroom (items 8, 14 and 32) of the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986). Affective variables such as FLA or WTC have been studied mainly in tertiary and secondary education. Only one study focuses on VET students in Indonesia (Murtiningsih, 2016), so further studies should be conducted in different parts of the world.

In order to understand the relationships between the affective variables of English language anxiety, WTC in English, and self-efficacy in English in VET, we studied academic research on the relationships between these affective variables and academic performance. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), we obtained an acceptable model that was fitted to the data. This model is novel, as no similar studies have been found in samples of VET students. Specifically, English language anxiety in the EFL classes has a high impact on these students' academic performance in English and a medium impact on their WTC in English. Thus, students who are more anxious about EFL classes have lower academic scores in EFL and a lower WTC in English and are considered less effective in English. These findings confirm the research hypothesis that affective factors (English language anxiety, WTC in English, and self-efficacy in English) influence VET students' academic EFL performance.

The effect of anxiety explained 21.5% ($R^2=0.215$) of VET students' academic performance in EFL. As expected, English language anxiety had a negative impact on academic performance (regression coefficient=-0.46). This suggests that students with more English language anxiety in EFL classes have poorer academic performance in EFL. This result is in line with other studies (Cong-Lem & Thu-Hang, 2018; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Park & French, 2013; Sajedi, 2017) that have empirically demonstrated the negative relationship and influence of English language anxiety on EFL secondary and tertiary education students' academic performance. For Rashtchi and Keyvanfar (2002), anxiety has a paralyzing effect on English learning when students feel they cannot master the language. However, it can have a facilitating effect when students have an optimal level. These findings are

consistent with those of Marcos-Llinás and Garau (2009), who suggest that a certain level of anxiety is appropriate for learning.

12% (R^2=0.12) of VET students' WTC in English is explained by English language anxiety. The direct path from English language anxiety to WTC in English was significantly negative (regression coefficient=-0.34). This suggests that VET students who are afraid to communicate in English are not comfortable in English classes and are frightened of a negative evaluation with lower grades in English. This result is along the same lines as other studies (Bensalem, 2022; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Murtiningsih, 2016; Saka & Merç, 2021) that find a negative relationship between English language anxiety and WTC in English among secondary education and university students. In contrast to this result, Manipuspika (2018) shows a positive relationship between English language anxiety and WTC in English with undergraduate students. This shows that students do not feel frustrated or discouraged despite their anxiety; Alemi and Pahmforoosh (2012) explain this situation, suggesting that there are students who actively participate in English classes to improve their level despite being aware of their English language anxiety.

The effect of anxiety explains almost 2% (R^2=0.019) of the feeling of self-efficacy in English achieved by VET students. Although this result is limited and not significant, for Hattie (2009) it can be highlighted in the field of education. The direct path from English language anxiety to self-efficacy in English was positive, although not significant (regression coefficient=0.13). It suggests that more anxious students about EFL classes tend to think that English is very challenging and feel that their English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, or writing is low. Low self-efficacy in English has a negative impact on a student's ability to complete a task successfully. These findings are consistent with other research (Cheng, 2004; Saka & Merç, 2021) that has found a negative relationship between English language anxiety and self-efficacy in English. Self-efficacy is relevant to Marashi and Dakhili (2015) because it is changeable and develops over time.

This research examines the influence of affective factors (English language anxiety, WTC in English, and self-efficacy in English) on VET students' academic performance in English in 2022. This work has a non-experimental but explanatory design. Thus, questionnaires were administered to students to collect information about the affective variables under study and their academic performance. The aim and the research question are answered with the results obtained after the structural equation analysis. With this type of analysis, we can test the influence of the relationships between the analyzed variables. The results obtained indicate that (i) the effect of English language anxiety on academic performance is large and negative, affecting 21.5% of VET students' academic performance; (ii) the effect of

English language anxiety on WTC in English is medium, explaining 12% of students' WTC in English, and (iii) the effect of English language anxiety on self-efficacy in English is small (non- significant) explaining only 1.2% of students' self-efficacy in English. These findings are a novelty, as no studies or explanatory models focus on affective factors that could explain VET students' EFL levels, considering that, in a VET context, only 20% of students have an official English certificate.

These findings have practical pedagogical implications for EFL teachers in the VET stage, who should improve their students' English level and reorganize their EFL teaching. First of all, the methodology should be changed, as reducing English language anxiety increases the WTC in English and the self-efficacy in English and EFL academic performance. EFL teachers in the VET stage should create relaxing learning environments and use a wide range of resources that may reduce students' anxiety in English classes (Dörnyei, 1994). For Merç (2015), there is a direct correlation between the environment and anxiety: The more relaxed the environment is, with more practice without negative feedback, the less anxiety there is in the classroom. Secondly, to help VET EFL teachers improve students' WTC in English, they should use joyful learning strategies and tools, including digital resources that allow students to feel comfortable in class and actively participate without fear of being assessed. De-la-Peña & Chaves-Yuste (2022) reported in a study on VET students' perceptions of EFL skills that they need changes in EFL teaching methodology and assessment. The students suggest that using games and activities related to daily life would facilitate their EFL learning process and contribute to developing language skills. Thirdly, EFL teachers of VET studies would have to design adapted activities by increasing the level of difficulty and adjusting the level of English to the diversity of VET classes, as students in this stage of education have generational differences. By doing so, students would experience a sense of learning different EFL language skills and acquire an appropriate level of self-efficacy in English. As Marashi and Dakhili (2015) argue, teachers should foster a positive sense of self-efficacy among students through different learning strategies and create a suitable learning environment that encourages students' progress. Finally, teachers should teach English for specific purposes focused on their subject area so that students feel and perceive the benefits of learning English for their professional development (Saorín, 2003).

This study has some limitations, such as the sample size, which is the minimum size to conduct structural equation modeling. Another limitation is the type of VET students, because there are other VET professions, and it would be interesting to use students from other VET fields to verify the results obtained in this research. Finally, the limitation concerning the

assessment tools used in this work is that the questionnaire used is not specific to VET students but to EFL students in general. Thus, generalizations should be made with caution.

In perspective, it would be convenient to select a larger sample from different randomly selected VET families and increase the sample size. In addition, specific instruments for VET students could be designed and validated, and cognitive variables could also be included in the study. Furthermore, a longitudinal design could be used to examine the development of the relationships between the variables over the school years in which the VET studies were conducted. This study can also be transferred to other international VET contexts and educational stages. In addition, it would also be interesting to propose EFL curricula for VET studies that improve students' EFL linguistic competence to optimize their entrepreneurship and national or international employment.

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Appendix A

Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTCS)
(Spanish adaptation of Díaz-Pinto (2009) and Santos (2014) of McCroskey and Baer (1985)

A continuación, tienes unas frases relacionadas con la disposición que tienes a comunicarte en inglés. Eres libre de elegir la frecuencia con la que estás dispuesto a comunicarte en cada situación reflejada en cada frase.

Responde de 0 a 5 puntos en cada frase, donde 0 significa nunca, 1 rara vez, 2 algunas veces, 3 aproximadamente el 50% del tiempo, 4 casi siempre y 5 casi siempre.

	0	1	2	3
Hablar en inglés al profesor/a, directamente, sin compañeros delante.				
Hablar en inglés al profesor/a delante de la clase.				
Hacer y contestar preguntas en inglés durante las clases.				
Presentar individualmente un tema en inglés al resto de mi clase.				
Dar mi opinión o emitir comentarios en inglés durante las clases.				
Comunicarme en inglés con los compañeros/as al realizar un trabajo en grupo.				
Hablar en inglés con otro compañero/a al realizar una actividad por parejas.				
Expresar en inglés mis gustos, aficiones y preferencias.				

Expresarme en un segundo idioma en clase hace que la imagen que tengo de mí mismo/a mejore.
Me siento cómodo/a hablando inglés en clase delante de otros compañeros.

Appendix B

Foreing Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Spanish adaptation of Pérez-Paredes & Martínez-Sánchez (2001) of Horwitz et al. (1986)

A continuación, tienes unas frases relacionadas con el aprendizaje de un idioma. Solo tienes que indicar con tu respuesta si estás más de acuerdo o desacuerdo en cada frase.

Responde de 1 a 5: 1 significa totalmente de acuerdo, 2 significa de acuerdo, 3 significa ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo, 4 significa en desacuerdo y 5 significa totalmente en desacuerdo.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Nunca estoy completamente seguro de mí mismo cuando hablo en clase de idioma extranjero.						
No me preocupa cometer errores en la clase.						
Tiemblo cuando sé que me van a llamar en clase.						
Me asusta no entender lo que el profesor está diciendo en idioma extranjero.						
No me molestaría en absoluto asistir a más clases de idioma extranjero.						
Durante la clase, me doy cuenta pienso en cosas que no tienen nada que ver con la clase.						
Pienso que a los otros compañeros se les da mejor los idiomas que a mí.						
Normalmente estoy a gusto cuando hago exámenes en clase.						
Me pongo muy nervioso cuando tengo que hablar en clase y no me he preparado bien.						
Me preocupa las consecuencias que pueda traer el suspender.						
No entiendo por qué alguna gente se siente mal por las clases de idioma extranjero.						
En clase, me pongo tan nervioso que se me olvidan algunas cosas que sé.						
Me da corte salir voluntario en clase.						
Creo que no me pondría nervioso si hablara el idioma extranjero con una persona nativa.						
Me irrita no entender lo que el profesor está corrigiendo.						
Aunque vaya con la clase preparada, me siento nervioso.						
A menudo no me apetece ir a clase.						

Me siento seguro a la hora de hablar en la clase.
Me da miedo que mi profesor corrija cada fallo que cometo.
Siento como mi corazón palpita cuando sé que me van a pedir que intervenga en clase.
Cuanto más estudio, más me lío.
No tengo ninguna presión ni preocupaciones para prepararme muy bien las clases.
Tengo la sensación de que mis compañeros hablan el idioma extranjero mejor que yo.
Me da mucho corte hablar en la lengua extranjera delante de mis compañeros.
Las clases transcurren con tal rapidez que me preocupa quedarme atrasado.
Comparativamente, estoy más tenso y me siento más nervioso en la clase de idioma extranjero que en otras clases o que en mi propio trabajo
Me pongo nervioso mientras hablo en clase.
Antes de entrar a clase, me siento seguro y relajado.
Me pongo nervioso cuando no entiendo cada una de las palabras que mi profesor dice.
Me abruma la cantidad de cosas que hay que aprender para poder hablar otro idioma.
Temo que mis compañeros de clase se rían de mí cuando hablo en otro idioma.
Creo que me sentiría a gusto hablando entre nativos que hablan el idioma que estudio.
Me pongo nervioso cuando el profesor pregunta cosas que no me he podido prepara.